

## Tsunami Early warning system: responsibility and uncertainty in Asia



I was in conflict-ridden Jaffna in October 2005. People living in temporary shelters there told me how panicked they were by the earthquake in Andaman and Nicobar islands in July. While no warning was issued by the Sri Lanka government, they had heard the news from the Indian Tamil television channels, they watch regularly. November in Maldives, I met a group of community leaders from 16 islands who were sceptical about effectiveness of a warning as there is no high building or place to take shelter in the island. Fishing families in Somalia still fear going to the sea. A group of women in Tamil Nadu India told me 'nobody said why tsunami did not happen even after warnings were issued in the night of 26 March'.

These people's voices remind me of the huge challenges and unpredictability in accessing warning information. The geo-political context, whether it is conflict or scattered islands in the Maldives, intersects with factors such as local occupations, patterns of migration and level of education to determine people's ability to access information. How they act on that information is determined by the level of investment in disaster preparedness for individuals, households and institutions.

While a technical ability to predict a tsunami is the precondition of disaster reduction but the foundations of disaster reduction lie elsewhere. We have a legal and moral obligation to act together. There are inspiring examples such as Bangladesh and Cuba which show us a safer world is possible.

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